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Voinovich fishes for voter support of EPA funding

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Gov. George V. Voinovich cast a minnow-baited line off the east side of the fishing pier at Edgewater Park yesterday, hoping a perch would be tempted to bite.

A strong, cold wind out of the cloudy northwest was at his back.

Then the governor turned and strode to the northern end of the pier, faced the full force of the wind head-on and cast a second, worm-baited line into the water.

"Might as well cast the line where the fish are," said the governor, hoping for walleye to strike.

A few minutes earlier at a news conference, Voinovich also met head-on the legislative storm from his proposed budget increase for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. He urged people to write their legislators to support his proposals.

Voinovich defended his plan to increase the EPA budget by raising fees charged to businesses such as landfill operators.

The Republican governor said businesses that are monitored by the EPA "make a lot of money." He said the state needed to get the cost of monitoring such operations from the people who use the service.

Voinovich spoke at a news conference at a wind-swept pavilion in the park. The purpose was to publicly mark the first of two days when Ohioans can fish state waters without a \$12 annual license and to note the volunteer cleanup of beaches along Lake Erie from Toledo to Conneaut promoted by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

But Voinovich soon turned to the EPA budget. The state cannot

adequately do its job of monitoring landfills, safeguarding drinking water and determining what fish are safe to eat and from what parts of Lake Erie, he said.

"I was shocked to learn that the state of Ohio spends less than \$100,000 to determine what fish is safe to eat," Voinovich said. "We need \$15 million in funding. The lake has different watersheds and fish from one part of the lake cannot be used to determine safety for another part of the lake."

The state advisory currently warns that bottom fish such as catfish and carp are unsafe, Voinovich said.

"We need dollars to do the job right," Voinovich said about the need to inspect fish and protect drinking water.

The governor and the legislature agree EPA should get \$38.3 million from the general fund for 1994-95. That represents \$2.6 million less than the EPA's general revenue budget this year.

Voinovich also had proposed that the EPA get \$138.9 million from fees and special income, a 100% increase from this year's budget. The House cut the figure to \$116.9 million. The Senate cut it slightly more.

Voinovich proposed, for example, an additional fee of 90 cents a ton on waste dumped in landfills to raise \$9.9 million for EPA's monitoring. The House cut it to 50 cents a ton and the Senate cut it to 40 cents. Legislative opponents said the EPA is mismanaged and inefficient.

Fishing near Voinovich on the pier was Doug Lasgilmore of Cleveland. "Haven't caught anything in the past hour," he said. "The wind makes the waves stir up the bottom and make things muddy. It's good catfish weather."